

Lead Awareness and Drinking Water Safety

Milwaukee's drinking water is clean and safe to drink. News about untreated water in Flint, Michigan has raised concerns about drinking water in other cities. Unlike Flint's water, Milwaukee's water meets all state and federal laws for water safety and quality. We regularly test the water to ensure this.

Lead is not found in Milwaukee's source water, Lake Michigan, and it is not found in our drinking water.

Years ago, lead was used in paint, plumbing, and other products. Lead can cause health problems if it builds up in your body. Children under the age of six, and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding are at special risk. The most common source of lead is from paint in buildings built before 1978.

While lead is not found in Milwaukee's drinking water, lead may enter drinking water at your house or building if it dissolves from the water service line or internal plumbing, and fixtures made of lead or containing lead, especially when water stands unused for several hours. To control lead dissolving into the water, the Milwaukee Water Works treats the water with a compound that forms a protective coating inside pipes. We have provided this corrosion control since 1996.

Structures built before 1951 were likely constructed with service lines made of lead. The water service line connects the water main in the street to your property and is the responsibility of the property owner. Lead pipes are dull gray in color and are soft enough to be easily scratched with a house key. Also, a magnet will not stick to a lead pipe. A licensed plumber can determine if your service line and/or plumbing are made of lead and can replace them for you at your cost.

The amount of lead in drinking water will vary based on the plumbing in your building, how much water is used, and how often it is used.

Which properties are most at risk of having lead in drinking water?

- Approximately 70,000 structures in Milwaukee that were built before 1947 have service lines made of lead.
- About 1,000 structures built between 1947 and 1951 may have lead or copper service lines. To check whether your property has a lead service line, call (414) 286-CITY.
- Buildings with internal plumbing made of lead.
- Buildings with faucets or fittings of brass which contain some lead. Plumbing and fixtures installed before January 1, 2014, or those purchased from sources outside of the United States, may contain lead. Since January 1, 2014, only lead-free fixtures and fittings are allowed to be installed or used to repair drinking water plumbing.
- Buildings with copper pipe and lead solder installed before 1987. Lead-based solder was banned for use after 1987.

Easy steps to reduce the risk of lead in your drinking water

There are three things you can do to reduce your exposure to lead in drinking water. These actions are particularly important if you have children under the age of six or women who are pregnant or breastfeeding living in your home.

1. Flush your plumbing. Before using tap water for drinking or cooking, flush your plumbing by running the cold water three minutes or longer until the water is noticeably colder. Do this if the water has been standing unused in your pipes for more than six hours, such as overnight or during the work day. It is safe to shower, wash laundry and flush the toilet if you have a lead service line. These activities help flush the pipes.

2. Only drink and cook with cold water from the cold water tap. Households with children under the age of six, or women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, should consider using bottled water or filtered tap water for formula, concentrated juices, cooking and drinking.

3. Remove the screen and aerator from faucets, rinse out any debris, and re-attach. Do this once a month. This will reduce the possibility that small particles that may contain lead could build up at your faucet.

Other steps to consider:

- Purchase a filtration system. Drinking water filtration systems or pour-through filters can reduce or eliminate lead. Look for products certified by NSF/ANSI under Standard 53 for removal of lead and follow the manufacturer's guidelines on installation and maintenance. Find a list of products at milwaukee.gov/water or call (414) 286-2830.
- Replace your lead service line or interior plumbing. A licensed plumber can help you assess the cost and feasibility of replacing your lead service line or interior plumbing. If you decide to do this, please call the Milwaukee Water Works at (414) 286-3710 for more information.
- The Milwaukee Water Works and the City of Milwaukee Health Department do not offer water testing.
- Find a list of laboratories where you can have your water tested for lead at milwaukee.gov/water or call (414) 286-2830.

Consider a blood test for lead in young children

No level of lead has been determined to be safe in the body. As a best practice, the City of Milwaukee Health Department recommends that all children are tested for lead by your health care provider three times before turning three. Children up to age six should have their blood tested for lead if there is no record of a previous test, if they live in a home built before 1978 with recent or ongoing renovation, or if they have a sibling or playmate who has lead poisoning.

After any water utility work or internal plumbing work, it is important that you flush your plumbing. Physical disturbance of the lead service line or lead piping by activities such as water main replacement, service line leaks, building plumbing repair, water meter replacement or main breaks may release lead into the water.

Here's how to flush your plumbing after work is completed:

- Remove screens and aerators from the end of all faucets and rinse particles from them.
- Starting in the lowest level (basement) and working to the top floor, turn on the cold water.
- After the water runs for 5-10 minutes, start at the top floor and turn off the water, finishing in the basement. Re-attach the screens and aerators to the faucets. The cost to flush four taps for 10 minutes is about 16 cents.

For more information on lead and drinking water safety, visit: Milwaukee.gov/water and Milwaukee.gov/health

If you have questions about lead in drinking water, call Milwaukee Water Works Customer Service, (414) 286-2830. Non-emergency email: watwebcs@milwaukee.gov

If you have questions about the health effects related to lead in drinking water, call the City of Milwaukee Health Department, (414) 286-3521.